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SUBJECT: Turkish Bloggers Sound Off On Political Developments

¶1. (U) Summary: Turkey's blogging community, while small, mostly reflects the larger current of sentiment in the elite secular community. Through comments on newspaper websites and individual blogs, Turks are sounding off about secularist demonstrations, the upcoming elections, and Turkey's political landscape. The general tone is pro-secular, anti-Baykal, anti-American, and mixed on the issue of military intervention. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Turkey's blogging community is relatively small. According to the UN's International Telecommunications Union, only an estimated twenty percent of Turks use the Internet on a regular basis. Of this group, most are not in the habit of accessing news websites or commenting on current events. Blogging appears to be primarily an occasional pastime of the elite, most of whom were exposed to the idea abroad.

¶3. (U) Even so, the Internet sites of Turkey's major newspapers are full of comment boards that are frequently used to express reactions to current events. "Milliyet", one of Turkey's leading dailies, recently started a blog site that produces commentary on everything from politics to raising children. Blogcu.com is another relatively popular site for aspiring Turkish bloggers on all subjects.

¶4. (U) In the heady political atmosphere of the past few weeks, Turkish bloggers have posted a flurry of opinions on current events. Many are commentaries on the secular side of the debate, but Islamist currents occasionally make a showing as well. Below is a sample of blog entries on popular websites posted within the last month, grouped by topic.

Baykal's Leadership

¶5. (U) The inability of Turkey's leftist-nationalist parties to come to an agreement on unification or electoral alliance is a main topic of conversation on political blogs. Most chastise Republic People's Party (CHP) leader Baykal for his iron grip on the CHP, but some also fault the smaller factions for lack of vision. The overwhelming sense is that power is the only thing holding the parties back, and that if the republicans were to find a unifying figure (i.e., someone other than Baykal), they would easily defeat the governing Justice and Development Party (AKP).

"There are world class leaders in CHP who will defend democracy and stand in front of tanks. If Baykal resigns soon, votes will flow to CHP. Baykal needs to be given a 'memorandum'."

"It looks like unity is difficult for them to see. It's been like this for years, hasn't it? Gentlemen, stop sweating the small stuff. Think about the citizenry; think about the country...Think big - not just as an opposition [party] but as the party in power! Aren't you sick of being in the minority or in a coalition?"

The Role of the US and the EU

¶6. (U) Many bloggers take up the role that the US and the EU are playing in the outcome of events. The general opinion is that while Turkish politicians bicker in public, they all bow to the same

master behind the scenes.

"None of the political parties have come out against the USA-EU agenda. Deniz Baykal said in an interview on Kanal Turk that it is impossible to have politics without 'the realities of the world' and the USA or EU. So then what's the difference between that and the AKP? If you're not going to pursue a different kind of politics then what's the trouble all about?"

"Yesterday I went to the meeting with my father and mother to the meeting in Caglayan. What I heard there was full of pride. The American [sympathizers] Erdogan and ABDullah Gul (ABD is the Turkish acronym for USA, hence labeling FM Gul as the USA's man) have goals that nobody else knows, which in my mind is inexplicably bad."

"Turkey's financials and its potential are obvious. Whoever comes in to power, it won't really matter much. The strings are in the hands of the USA and IMF. It's the IMF that determines Turkey's minimum wage."

The Message of the Demonstrations

¶7. (U) Bloggers from across the political spectrum recognize that the pro-secular demonstrations are a force to be dealt with, but disagree on whether they will ultimately be effective at changing the power dynamic and whether the military should get involved.

"The people who flowed into the public squares said that they don't want a [military] intervention, but don't want a civilian intervention in Cankaya either."

"One solid result came from the meetings in Istanbul. Millions of people said that the secular nature of the state is very special. They said one more thing: we don't want a military intervention. We are the ones who establish and live in this democracy."

...And the Other Side

¶8. (U) Islam-oriented blogs are few and far between, but there is some commentary against the prevailing winds of secularism.

"I'm not afraid of this nation Mr. [Buyukanit]...I'm going to hold my headscarved lover's hand, read verses from the Koran, read verses from the Koran without your knowledge...later I might get together with some of my fellow dangerous citizens and say 'Allah' with them."

"For the first time in history, the Kemalist secularist ideology of Turkey's ranting, oligarchic elite is coming together in the waste dump...After seventy years of being privileged by their fractious rule, their thoughtless ideology has no meat on its bones."

WILSON